

In September 2023, the Biden administration's recommendations to improve mining on public lands called for the establishment of a Good Samaritan remediation. The administration strongly supports the establishment of a Good Samaritan remediation program through the bill.

Mr. Speaker, I urge passage of this bill that would allow us to address important environmental issues.

Ms. MALOY. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. GRAVES).

Mr. GRAVES of Louisiana. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from Utah (Ms. MALOY) and the gentlewoman from Alaska (Mrs. PELTOLA) for coming together on this important bipartisan legislation.

Mr. Speaker, the reality is that there are abandoned mines all over the United States. There are very few in Louisiana because you hit water when you go subsurface in most cases, but we do have some mines in the northern part of the State.

The reason I am excited about this legislation is because it incentivizes the right type of behavior.

Mr. Speaker, my colleagues need to think about the two alternatives here. One alternative is that these abandoned mines and the environmental risks that they pose are left unadulterated. They would be left behind with the risk and the threat.

The other is you allow the work of a Good Samaritan, someone who wants to come in to help carry out remediation efforts. This can't be someone that created the mine. It can't be someone who is a PRP or otherwise has liability associated with the mine. They are folks who want to come in to eliminate the risk, to reduce the risk, and to clean things up.

This is exactly the type of behavior that we should be incentivizing. This is exactly what we should be doing.

In fact, I would love to see us actually expand this into areas like coastal Louisiana, where we have lost 2,000 square miles of our coast, incentivizing Good Samaritans to come in to carry out remediation efforts or restoration efforts.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from Alaska (Mrs. PELTOLA) for taking a leadership role and working together with my good friend, the gentlewoman from Utah (Ms. MALOY), on this great bipartisan legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I will say it again. This type of pilot program is the exact thing that we should be doing on a broader basis, on an expanded basis, because this incentivizes the right type of behavior. It eliminates risk and eliminates threats to the environment, and I appreciate this legislation being brought up.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support the bill.

Mrs. PELTOLA. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentlewoman from Nevada (Ms. LEE).

Ms. LEE of Nevada. Mr. Speaker, I thank Mrs. PELTOLA and Ms. MALOY for their leadership.

Abandoned hardrock mines are scattered all across the American West, including in my own district, which is home to some of the oldest mine lands in Nevada. Their pollutants are poisoning our waters, threatening Tribal lands and resources, and creating hazardous landscapes that have injured and killed Americans.

A range of highly qualified partners, from State and local agencies to the nonprofit guardians of America's great outdoors, such as Trout Unlimited, stand ready to work with the Federal Government to clean up these sites.

Today's bipartisan, bicameral legislation will safely and responsibly cut through red tape currently preventing these Good Samaritans from doing so. It has taken 25 years of consensus building to craft this version of the Good Sam bill now on the floor. That is a quarter century of collaboration that has earned this version of the bill the support of every Member of the U.S. Senate; our Transportation and Infrastructure Committee; a bipartisan coalition of lawmakers, myself included, who have led the charge to get this legislation across the finish line in this Congress; and stakeholders from The Nature Conservancy to the National Congress of American Indians and the Western Governors' Association.

Mr. Speaker, here is a sobering reminder: Across these multiple decades, abandoned hardrock mines have continued to send mercury, arsenic, lead, and other toxic materials into our rivers and communities.

Let's take a look back in history to highlight just one example.

When the Senator from Montana first proposed the Good Sam legislation back in 1999, officials from the State were hoping that it would provide a pathway for them to help clean up an 1800s-era abandoned mine polluting Montana's Corbin Creek. After 25 years, with Good Sam bill after Good Sam bill dying here in Washington, Corbin Creek still remains on Montana's list of impaired waters to this day, and for no good reason since Good Samaritans have been willing to actively assist.

The time for talking is over. It is now time for the House to act. Before Congress adjourns, we have a historic opportunity to put our Nation on an accelerated path to cleaner waters and safer landscapes. This Good Sam bill is a good bill.

The Clean Water Act and Superfund both aim to restore and maintain the integrity of America's waters, and this bill moves us closer to that objective. It also includes multiple protections and provisions to prevent any abuse or backsliding.

Mr. Speaker, I ask both my Republican and Democratic colleagues to join me in voting at long last to pass it.

Ms. MALOY. Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers and am prepared to close. I reserve the balance of my time.

Mrs. PELTOLA. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time to close.

Mr. Speaker, mining is a very interesting field, and a lot of modern mining is very, very environmentally conscious. I think it is noteworthy to recognize that all rock is between zero to six or seven stages of acid rock leaching. All that means is, if acid-leaching rock is crushed, its exposure to water and air becomes a contaminant to fish.

Acid-rock drainage was not very well understood in some of the early mines, and I know that there are a lot of entities that are very interested and have a lot of philanthropic money behind them to put toward remediation and reclamation.

This act provides a reasonable, commonsense approach to ensure that voluntary parties that had nothing to do with the cause of pollution are able to take steps to reduce the environmental health and safety problems associated with abandoned mine sites.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this legislation, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. MALOY. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time for the purposes of closing.

The Good Samaritan Remediation of Abandoned Hardrock Mines Act, the Good Samaritan Act, is the right step forward. There is a clear irony here that the Clean Water Act and CERCLA are unintentionally standing in the way of sensible, low-risk mine clean-ups.

I ask that my colleagues support this monumental legislation, the concepts for which have been in the works for over two decades. The strong bipartisan nature of this bill cannot be overstated, with Senators and Members of Congress working alongside stakeholders and industry leaders across the political spectrum, including the White House, to make this bill into law.

I thank my co-lead, Congresswoman MARY PELTOLA, for her leadership and partnership and for the support of the bill's bipartisan cosponsors.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

□ 1600

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentlewoman from Utah (Ms. MALOY) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, S. 2781.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

AMTRAK TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR PASSENGERS AND TAXPAYERS ACT

Ms. MALOY. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 8692) to require that the Amtrak Board of Directors comply with the open meetings requirements of section 552b of title 5, United States Code, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.
The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 8692

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Amtrak Transparency and Accountability for Passengers and Taxpayers Act”.

SEC. 2. OPEN MEETINGS.

Section 24301(e) of title 49, United States Code, is amended—

(1) by striking “Section 552 of title 5, this part” and inserting the following:

“(1) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in paragraph (3), sections 552 and 552b of title 5, this part”;

(2) in the second sentence by striking “Section 552 of title 5, United States Code, applies” and inserting the following:

“(2) TIMING OF APPLICATION.—Except as provided in paragraph (3), sections 552 and 552b of title 5 apply”; and

(3) by adding at the end the following:

“(3) SCOPE OF APPLICATION.—

“(A) INFORMATION.—The requirements of the second sentence of section 552(b) of title 5 shall not apply to any portion of an Amtrak meeting and subsections (d) and (e) of section 552b of title 5 shall not apply to any information pertaining to any portion of an Amtrak meeting otherwise required by section 552b of title 5 to be disclosed to the public in any case in which Amtrak properly determines that such portion or portions of the meeting or the disclosure of such information is likely to involve—

“(i) contract negotiations, including negotiations for contract procurements and agreements, the disclosure of which would imperil or compromise the competitive position of Amtrak;

“(ii) collective bargaining agreements or any terms and conditions that are proposed for inclusion in any collective bargaining agreement, including the negotiation of terms and conditions with employees or representatives of employees of Amtrak; and

“(iii) with respect to any individual who is a prospective officer, employee, or contractor or an officer, employee, or contractor employed or appointed by Amtrak, matters involving the employment, appointment, termination of employment, terms and conditions of employment, evaluation of the performance of, promotion or disciplining of any such individual, unless all such individuals whose rights could be adversely affected request in writing that the matter or matters be discussed at a public meeting.

“(B) ADDITIONAL APPLICATION.—In addition to the information described in subparagraph (B), the information described in section 552b(c) shall apply to Amtrak meetings.”.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentlewoman from Utah (Ms. MALOY) and the gentlewoman from Alaska (Mrs. PELTOLA) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Utah.

GENERAL LEAVE

Ms. MALOY. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material in the RECORD on H.R. 8692.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Utah?

There was no objection.

Ms. MALOY. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, the Government in the Sunshine Act, or Sunshine Act, was es-

tablished to increase the public's confidence in its government.

Under the Sunshine Act, meetings of government agencies must be open to the public unless one of the statute's exemptions apply.

The act defines an agency as one headed by a collegial body, a majority of whose members are nominated by the President, and whose appointment is subject to advice and consent of the Senate. This clearly describes Amtrak.

The need for full transparency at Amtrak has never been greater. Here are just a few examples.

First, last fiscal year, Amtrak reported operating losses of \$757 million. These were losses made up for by taxpayers. Its Acela II train sets are more than 3 years behind schedule, and the delays have cost Amtrak more than \$140 million in lost revenues.

Additionally, the Northeast Corridor Commission estimates its state of good repair backlog on the Northeast Corridor exceeds \$78.7 billion. Further, the Biden administration's infrastructure law provides for more than \$66 billion in advanced appropriations that Amtrak can use to expand service, regardless of the need to make a profit.

With so much of the taxpayers' money in Amtrak's hands, there clearly needs to be more transparency and accountability for the decisions made by the passenger rail service's board, and this bill provides just that.

Mr. Speaker, I urge support of this legislation, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mrs. PELTOLA. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 8692. This bill requires Amtrak's board of directors to hold open meetings, ensures the public is notified of upcoming meetings, and allows the public to observe board meetings.

The bill increases transparency and allows exceptions when certain sensitive financial and contractual obligations are discussed, including contract negotiations with Amtrak's workers.

Transparency is important, and the concept of open board meetings has support from the Rail Passengers Association and the States for Passenger Rail Coalition.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this legislation, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. MALOY. Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. NEHLS).

Mr. NEHLS. Mr. Speaker, H.R. 8692, the Amtrak Transparency and Accountability for Passengers and Taxpayers Act, is essential legislation for mandating transparency from Amtrak.

This bill applies the Government in the Sunshine Act of 1976 to Amtrak, requiring meetings of its board of directors to be open to public observation with certain exceptions.

Amtrak's status as a governmental entity for the purposes of the Sunshine Act is beyond dispute. All its voting board members are nominated by the

President and confirmed by the Senate. It shares characteristics with other government-created and -sponsored entities that require board of director meetings to be open.

Amtrak receives substantial taxpayer support. Never in its more than 50-year history has it made a profit, and now it has access to more than \$66 billion. That is with a b, Mr. Speaker. For those of you upstairs, that is \$66 billion in taxpayer support through the Biden administration's infrastructure law.

How this funding will be utilized and how Amtrak is managed is of great importance to its customers, employees, and taxpayers at large.

It is often said that sunshine is the best disinfectant. Opening up many of Amtrak's board of director meetings will better ensure that its decisions are made in the best interest of the public. With so much at stake, Amtrak should not be the exception to transparency.

Mr. Speaker, I am grateful to Chairman GRAVES and the members of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee for supporting H.R. 8692, and I urge support of this legislation.

Mrs. PELTOLA. Mr. Speaker, this bill will increase transparency of Amtrak decisions as Amtrak uses Federal funding to improve operations, and I urge my colleagues to support this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. MALOY. Mr. Speaker, H.R. 8692 represents an important step in providing much-needed transparency and accountability to meetings by Amtrak's board of directors and the decisions they make that involve billions of taxpayer dollars.

Mr. Speaker, I urge support of this bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentlewoman from Utah (Ms. MALOY) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 8692, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess subject to the call of the Chair.

Accordingly (at 4 o'clock and 5 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1630

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. FERGUSON) at 4 o'clock and 30 minutes p.m.